

## **Disability Awareness Month**

### **RECOGNITION AWARDS**

People love recognition. You can conduct a recognition ceremony for a member of your community who has made a significant contribution to services and programs for people with disabilities. And Disability Awareness Month is the perfect time of year to recognize these individuals. The enclosed timeline and checklist will help you to plan and organize your event.

### **Possible Award Candidates**

Leaders of local advocacy groups or organizations that work with people with disabilities are good resources for names of people who have worked “beyond the call of duty.” When reviewing candidates for an outstanding citizen award, consider what they proposed to do in the community versus what they actually achieved. Have positive effects been seen or felt throughout the entire community? Were the people who were affected pleased with the outcomes? You might want to ask local celebrities or some other unbiased panel to select the final recipient(s).

### **Ceremony**

Decide when and where the presentation will be made. It could take place in conjunction with a community event or public meeting. When selecting a location, be sure the facility is accessible. Consider whom you want to make the actual presentation of the award. For instance, the mayor could give the award at a weekly or monthly news conference. A city official or respected community leader might make the presentation at a service club meeting. Or the

director of your organization could present or co-present the award at an Awareness Month activity.

### **Certificate**

This packet includes two recognition certificates that can be presented to your award recipient(s). You might want to have your organization's name and the recipients' names added in calligraphy or laser-printed by a quick print shop that has typesetting equipment. It is also more impressive and a nice gesture if you frame the certificate.

### **Media Relations**

Be sure to invite the media. Call to get the names of the editor(s) of the local paper(s) and the news director(s) of local radio and television station(s). Let them know that March is Disability Awareness Month and your organization is conducting the local campaign. Give your contacts information on what you've planned for the local award ceremony. Invite them to attend the ceremony or send a reporter.

It's appropriate for you to suggest possible story ideas and inform them that you will be sending a press release soon. (See enclosed release.)

Be sure to get the correct spelling of the media representatives' names as well as their titles and mailing addresses. You'll need to retype the enclosed release on your organization's letterhead and include a contact name with a phone number. If you don't have letterhead, use white bond paper. Mail the release at least one week prior to the awards ceremony.

To monitor media coverage, greet media representatives who attend and write down their names. Have your friends' record local television newscasts or radio station interviews. Don't forget your local papers – watch for any articles.

### **Follow Up**

Your event should be followed up with thank you letters to the media and volunteers who helped with the event. The enclosed letter is a sample for you to follow, but personalize each letter as appropriate. The letter should be sincere and not too formal. Use your own ideas, wording and facts.

## **RECOGNITION AWARDS TIMELINE CHECKLIST**

\*\* This timeline checklist should be adjusted according to your specific planning time frame.

### **Six weeks before announcing recipients:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Decide which criteria will be used to judge recipients and how they will be nominated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Contact local advocacy groups or organizations that could nominate candidates and inform them about deadlines.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Contact local celebrities who could serve as judges and schedule a meeting to evaluate candidates.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Choose a place and date for the award presentation. Call the manager or person in charge of reservations at the location of your choice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Contact the mayor and other local officials and invite them to participate in the presentation.

### **Four weeks before announcing recipients:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Call the local newspaper(s), radio and television station(s) and get contact names for the release you will be mailing. Be sure to get the correct spelling of names as well as titles and mailing addresses.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Notify the person being honored and make sure he or she is able to attend the event.

### **Two weeks before announcing recipients:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Confirm participating officials. If possible, find out what time they plan to attend. This information will help the media schedule photo assignments.

### **One week before announcing recipients:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Mail the release to appropriate contacts. Follow up a few days later to be sure they received the release.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Remind your friends and volunteers to help you monitor the media coverage.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arrange to have a volunteer take pictures of the award presentation. Use black-and-white film so you can send prints after the event to newspapers that didn't send reporters. You might want to take the pictures yourself.

**Day of the event:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Arrive 15 minutes early to make sure everything is set up properly. Greet the mayor and media representatives.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Find out what media outlets are represented and ask for reporters' names.

**After the event:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Send thank you letters to the appropriate people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Send a follow-up news release and black-and-white photo to the local newspaper(s) that did not cover your event. Be sure to clearly identify those photographed.

(Sample News Release)

For Immediate Release  
(Date)

Contact:  
(Your name)  
(Your phone)

**(John Doe) to Receive Disability Service Award**

(Anytown), IN -- (John Doe) will receive (Any town's) Disability Community Service Award (at 6 p.m., Friday, March \_\_,) during the City Council meeting at (City Hall, 1234 Main Street).

Mayor (William Smith) will present the certificate to (Doe) because of his significant contributions to organize and implement Disability Awareness Month activities, which have helped raise awareness of disability issues in (Anytown).

“(Doe) was instrumental in encouraging (Anytown) businesses to conduct accessibility audits of their buildings, resulting in greater accessibility for people with disabilities,” said Mayor (Smith).

(Doe) said, “I feel it's important that all people with disabilities have equal access in our community. It's great to see that everyone agrees.”

# # #

(Sample Thank You Letter)

(Date)

The Honorable (Jack Smith)  
Mayor of (Anytown)  
(123 Main Street)  
(Anytown), Indiana (46000)

Dear Mayor (Smith):

Thank you for participating in the Community Service Award Ceremony. By presenting the award to (John Doe), you helped draw public attention to the important contributions of this fine citizen.

We hope to encourage others in our community to follow (John Doe's) example and become a supporter of people with disabilities. It's our goal to increase awareness in the community of people with disabilities as being people first. We appreciate your help in working toward that goal.

Thanks again for your interest and support.

Sincerely,

(Your name)  
(Title)